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Sand and Skirts: A Study of British Women in Early Colonial Fremantle, 1829-39

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NOTRE DAME**  
A U S T R A L I A

**School of Arts and Sciences, Fremantle**

# **SAND AND SKIRTS**

A STUDY OF BRITISH WOMEN IN EARLY COLONIAL  
FREMANTLE,  
1829-39

**Honours Dissertation**  
Bachelor of Arts (Hons)

of  
**Toni Church**

Supervised by  
Associate Professor Deborah Gare

Presented 31 October 2011



# DECLARATION

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I declare that this Research Project is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which had not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Toni Church  
31 October 2011



# ABSTRACT

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This study of Fremantle during the first decade of British settlement at Swan River investigates the trauma and triumph of its female colonists. In this outpost of empire, British women hoped for a better life, with greater economic and social freedoms, and a promising future for their families. They faced many challenges to achieve these aspirations.

On their journey to Swan River they experienced the cramped conditions on board the emigrant ships that bred disease and discontent amongst passengers. Some suffered from violence, and loss was a part of everyday life. Loss of belongings and livestock in rough seas hampered their prosperity in the new settlement. Loss of children, husbands or guardians, while emotionally devastating, could have ended women's colonial experiment before even reaching Fremantle.

Upon arrival at Swan River, female colonists were met with a sandy, barren, disappointment of their expectations. Fremantle in 1829 to 1832 was not the Arcadian paradise many emigrants had hoped. Living in hot, sandy, pest-ridden tents on the beaches of Fremantle, female colonists had to uphold the propriety of daily life. They cared for children, assisted their husbands, and worked in the domestic sphere. Their fear of the local Nyungah Aboriginal people was ever-present, as was the constant threat of illness, accident and loss of life. A number of colonists left Fremantle during these harsh early years.

From 1833, conditions at Fremantle improved. Economic stability ushered in greater freedoms for female colonists. Land ownership and business opportunities became available. Domestic servants could demand higher wages and better working conditions in these sturdier conditions. With the progress of the colonial economy, Fremantle developed as a town. An increase in institutions such as schools encouraged a burgeoning sense of colonial identity and sense of community at Fremantle. Although the period was marked with increased frontier conflict with the Nyungah people, most major clashes occurred outside of Fremantle.

The development of Fremantle, and the resulting achievements of female colonists in 1839 lay in stark contrast to the conditions of earlier settlement. Emigrant women's initial aspirations and goals for settlement were mostly fulfilled by the end of the first decade of colonisation at Swan River. The colony was prosperous: land ownership and business opportunities were realised, colonial identity and social advancement were possible and Fremantle held realistic potential as a strong future for female colonist's families.



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# INTRODUCTION

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Designed in the chambers of Whitehall in the closing months of 1828, and placed into existence by military men as a free settlement, the Swan River colony was, in its very essence, separate and distinct from the penal colonies of eastern Australia. Its colonists were promised healthy, fertile soil, a pleasant climate and an abundance of fresh food and water.<sup>1</sup> Such promises had fuelled a 'Swan River Mania', the frenzied 'get-rich-quick scheme' of empire building in Western Australia.<sup>2</sup> Yet landing on the beaches of Fremantle in 1829, its first white colonists were disappointed. The devastating reality of the 'low and sandy' town of Fremantle, where the 'trees were quite bleached and leaning in one direction'<sup>3</sup> soon produced melancholy within the settlement. By then, hundreds of British migrants had decided to undertake, and even embarked upon, the journey to Swan River. By April 1830 Fremantle's white population had reached 1500 people.<sup>4</sup> Almost all remained under canvas, exposed to weather and pests.<sup>5</sup> All faced the nervousness of dwindling food supplies and the uncertainty regarding confrontation with the 'natives'.

Those British women who arrived from 1829 faced particular odds in the earliest years of colonisation. Colonial life was difficult, made more so by the primitive conditions of the new settlement. Fremantle's women faced many of the same anxieties as they experienced at home: care for children and family; provision of food; maintenance of clothing and linens; education of children; pregnancy and so on. But the colonial environment and conditions added further complexities: alien foods; shortage of supplies; unexpected illnesses; poor sanitation; tragic

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline O'Brien and Pamela Statham-Drew, *On We go: The Wittenoom Way, The Legacy of a Colonial Chaplain*, Fremantle Press, Western Australia, 2009, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Mary E. Calder, *Early Swan River Colony*, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, 1977, pp.16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Friend, *Diary, 1829-1830*, J.S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, ACC4453A, pp.13-15.

<sup>4</sup> R.T. Appleyard and Toby Manford, *The Beginning: European Discovery and Early Settlement of Swan River, Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, p.150.

<sup>5</sup> George Bayly, *A Life on the Ocean Wave: Voyages to Australia, India and the Pacific from the Journals of Captain George Bayly 1824-1844*, Pamela Statham and Rica Erickson (eds), The Miegunyah Press, Carlton South, 1998, p.126.

accidents and isolation. Fears mounted, particularly of the risks posed to husbands and children by the land, its beasts and its native people.

Yet Fremantle's women, regardless of class, status, wealth or education, must have hoped the colonial experiment would bring advantages and improvement in circumstance. Many women and their families dreamed of what poet, T. Campbell, called an Arcadian paradise, the dream of 'pride to rear an independent shed, and give the lips we love unborrow'd bread'.<sup>6</sup> Clearly most, if not all, believed the risk of the colonial experiment was outweighed by its prospective advantages.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HISTORY

An extensive tradition of historical scholarship regarding British women in colonial Australia already exists. Such historians as Anne Summers, Miriam Dixon, Eve Pownall and Deborah Oxley have written provocative and influential accounts of women's history in Australia.<sup>7</sup> Before such modern scholarship was informed by feminist theory, however, traditional studies of early colonial women were often written by their descendants or admirers, particularly in Western Australia where a pioneering tradition was strong. Edith Cowan, for example, played an active role in the establishment and scholarship of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society: she contributed many papers to *Early Days: Journal and Proceedings of Royal Western Australian Historical Society* which highlighted her own family's history in the state.<sup>8</sup> Such research was normally married with what Simon Stevens has called the 'gentry tradition' in Western Australian historical scholarship: affirming the heroic status of Britain's free middle classes who forged a

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<sup>6</sup> T. Campbell, Esq., 'On the Departure of Emigrants for Swan River', extract in *The Fremantle Observer, Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 23/5/1831.

<sup>7</sup> See: Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to 1975*, Penguin Books, Ringwood (Vic), 1976; Deborah Oxley, *Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; Eve Pownall, *Australian Pioneer Women*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Rigby Limited, Melbourne, 1964; Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: the Colonization of Women in Australia*, Penguin Book, Ringwood (Vic), 1975.

<sup>8</sup> See: E.D. Cowan, 'Letters of Early Settlers (read before the Society, June 24, 1927)', *Early Days: Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 1, part 1, 1927, pp.55-58; E.D. Cowan, 'Early Social Life and Fashions (read before the Society, April 27, 1928)', *Early Days: Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 1, part 3, 1928, pp.1-17.

‘New Britannia’ on the outskirts of Empire.<sup>9</sup> Later in the twentieth century, women’s historians, many of whom were informed by feminist theory, often tried to fill the gaps in the traditional historical records of Australia. Attention was focussed on convict and free women, both equally maligned in reputation by the stigma of early British settlement in Botany Bay. Many such works considered the early colonial experiences of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land at the expense of the free colonies in Western Australia and South Australia.

The origins of the Swan River Colony could not have been more different to those of New South Wales forty years earlier. Fremantle itself was ‘laid’ by the British over the land of the Nyungah, an exercise in empire building made possible by the participation of private investors, free colonists and their servants.<sup>10</sup> The men of the 63<sup>rd</sup> regiment who accompanied Stirling and his colonists did so for their protection, not their imprisonment. For many, the Swan River settlement represented a new life, prosperity and an opportunity for self-improvement, not a life of punishment in an unimaginably hellish environment. The Swan River Colony experience was far removed from that of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land. For this reason it is impractical to suggest they had a shared early history.

A number of Western Australian historians, including Patricia Crawford, Jenny Gregory, Jan Gothard, Raelene Frances, Rica Erickson and Penelope Hetherington, have sought to amend the record of early women’s history to take into account the particular experiences in Western Australia. The scope of their research ranges from women’s experiences in the home and in employment; in relation to children and family, health, love and in regions and towns across the state.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Simon Stevens, ‘The Gentry Tradition of Western Australian History Writing’, Curtin University PhD manuscript, 2007, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Gare, ‘The Female Frontier: Women and Race in Fremantle, 1829 – 1848’, Fremantle Studies Day, Fremantle Historical Society, 23 October 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Being Australian Women: Belonging, Citizenship and Identity*, Cheryl Lange (ed.), Studies in Western Australian History, no.21, Department of History – University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 2000; Patricia Crawford, ‘Early Childhood in Perth 1940-1945, from the Records of the Lady Gowrie Child Centre’, in *Childhood and Society in Western Australia*, Penelope Hetherington (ed.), University of Western Australia Press (with the Centre for Western Australian History), Nedlands, 1988, pp. 187-208; Patricia Crawford, ‘Women and Citizenship in Britain 1500-1800’, in *Women as Australian Citizens: Underlying Histories*, Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern (eds), Melbourne University Press, Carlton South (Vic), 2001, pp.



A study such as this of Fremantle's women from 1829 to 1839 presents further opportunities for knowledge of Western Australia's early history. It encompasses complex and extensive experiences of many different aspects of women's lives in Fremantle including a study of age, wealth, employment, status, health and adaptability, among others. These themes are prevalent in the stories of the women who left records of their experiences, including Mary Ann Friend, wife of Captain Friend of the *Wanstead* who arrived in Fremantle in 1830; Jane Roberts, Friend's young charge who came under her care after losing her brother to illness at Cape Town<sup>12</sup>; and Jane Currie, wife of the first Harbour Master at Fremantle. These ladies, and others, left behind records of their experiences in early Fremantle, providing evidence of women's experiences on the frontier. They recorded the minutiae of everyday life, alongside the trauma of colonial reality at Fremantle. The diary of Anne Whatley, for instance, tells of the loss of her husband and her return to Britain; Eliza Shaw's letters detail her complaints of the difficulties of living in sandy tents and her low opinion of her fellow colonists; the diary of Frances Mitchell proudly describes the work of her husband, Reverend of Fremantle; newspapers published local

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48-82; Rica Erickson, *The Bride Ships: Experiences of Immigrants Arriving in Western Australia 1849-1889*, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park (WA), 1992; Jane Long, Jan Gothard and Helen Brash (eds), *Forging Identities: Bodies, Gender and Feminist History*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1997; Raelene Frances and Bruce Scates, *Women at Work in Australia: From Gold Rushes to World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993; Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007; Raelene Frances, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria 1880-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993; Phyl Garrick, ' "People of Glass": Women Becoming Visible in the History of Western Australia', *Studies in Western Australian History*, Patricia Crawford (ed.), vol. 7, University of Western Australia Press, 1983, pp.22-32; Jan Gothard, *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2001; Jenny Gregory, 'The Socialization [sic] of Middle-Class Children in a Perth Suburb, 1910-1940', in *Childhood and Society in Western Australia*, Penelope Hetherington (ed.), University of Western Australia Press (with Centre for Western Australian History), Nedlands, 1988, pp. 105-126; Penelope Hetherington, *Herstories – Our History: Bibliography of Western Australian Women's History*, Edith Cowan University, Churchlands, 1998; Penelope Hetherington, *Settlers, Servants & Slaves: Aboriginal and European Children in Nineteenth-century Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2002; Penelope Hetherington, 'The History of Australian Women', in *Women in Western Australian History*, *Studies in Western Australian History*, Patricia Crawford (ed.), vol.7, Department of History - University of Western Australia, December 1983, pp. 1-21; Penelope Hetherington, 'Writing the History of Childhood in Western Australia', in *Childhood and Society in Western Australia*, Penelope Hetherington (ed.), University of Western Australia Press (with Centre for Western Australian History), Nedlands, 1988, pp. 1-12; Prue Joske, *Dearest Isabella: The life and letters of Isabella Ferguson 1819-1910*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1989; *Sexuality and Gender in History: Selected Essays*, Penelope Hetherington and Phillipa Maddern (eds), Centre for Western Australian History – University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1993; *Women and Citizenship: Suffrage Centenary*, *Studies in Western Australian History*, Patricia Crawford and Judy Skene (eds), vol. 19, Department of History – University of Western Australia, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Friend, p.12.

scandals such as the case of Elizabeth Gamble, a young indentured servant, who was accused of infanticide after the loss of her baby in a house fire. Each of these accounts contributes rich detail to the study of women's lives in early colonial Fremantle.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study of British women on the colonial frontier at Fremantle focuses on the trauma of this experience, the trials faced and triumphs they accomplished living in such conditions. To do so, this thesis will

- determine the incentives considered by British women to migrate to Fremantle from 1829, including identification of those advantages they hoped to gain by the colonial experiment;
- consider the dangers of emigration presented by the journey to the Swan River Colony, upon first arrival and within the first decade of settlement;
- explore the nature of colonial life at Fremantle and, in particular, British women's experiences of this life;
- assess the benefits achieved by women in their migration to Fremantle; and finally,
- decide whether these benefits were sufficient to warrant the costs incurred by British women to settle in early Fremantle, particularly as they are compared to the initial aspirations of settlement.

It should be noted that this is a study of British women on the frontier. While it is acknowledged there exists an equally complex and diverse story to be told of Nyungah women's experiences of the Fremantle frontier, restrictions to the size and context of this thesis will not do their stories justice here. Fremantle's indigenous women have a complex story of dispossession, resistance, retaliation, and assimilation. In many cases the stories of Fremantle's Aboriginal women are intertwined with those of British women on the colonial frontier. These traditional owners are acknowledged and will be discussed where context allows throughout the thesis.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the aims of this thesis, a number of research questions were considered. The impetus for emigration to Swan River was investigated, in particular, the events occurring in Britain leading up to 1829 that made Fremantle an attractive place for potential colonists; the promises of Fremantle were compared with the reality of these being achievable by women should they have stayed in Britain. This was inherently valued-laden, and as such, required a study of British women's values, expectations and hopes for their own lives, as well as those of their families or others who joined them on the journey to Swan River.

To consider the dangers of emigration, this study had to consider the reality of settlement: the conditions of the journey, the period of first arrival, and the first decade as a whole, as experienced by the British women who settled at Fremantle. This was done as a study of the women's own stories as told through private archives such as diaries and letters, and as a wider study of the general experiences of colonists as told through public records and previous historical work. This exploration of colonial life asked questions of the minutiae recorded by these women, the everyday tasks of housing, feeding and caring for themselves and their families; adapting to colonial conditions and if they were indentured labourers, how this affected their experience of the colony compared with free colonists. Significant events at Fremantle were studied. These were mostly reported by newspapers, their value being in the reactions of colonial women to these events, and the after effects of such, on the lives of women in Fremantle.

Although the trauma of settlement soon became obvious, there were benefits in the colonial experience. These were assessed within the context of migration, the physical journey to Fremantle, upon first arrival and overwhelmingly towards the latter part of the decade. This became a study of colonial improvement, town development and the significant changes Fremantle and its colonists experienced during the first decade of British settlement. These benefits were subjective to the women's initial aspirations and incentives for migration, a comparison of their success at Fremantle to the realistic potential of their old lives in Britain.

## FINDINGS

The challenges of settlement were significant for female colonists, but there were benefits to balance this hardship. The early years of settlement in particular proved an enormous test of fortitude for Fremantle's British women. The cost of colonisation was high, both in material and personal costs. The colony did not prove popular, many left believing the experiment was not worth the hardship. The journey itself was fraught with difficulties. So too was settlement in its infancy. Women battled feelings of isolation and ill health; were victims of violence and accidents; experienced the loss of family and friends; some lost their own lives during the journey or soon after arrival. They feared the outbreak of violence with the Nyungah 'natives', strange illnesses from poor nutrition, starvation and even death.

Yet from 1832 matters improved. Fremantle, which had seemed so hopeless in the early years of settlement, had progressed and developed into a promising town. This development provided many colonists with those long-term benefits they had hoped to achieve by migration, including economic prosperity, secure employment, business opportunities, land ownership, greater education for their children and social advancement.

## DISCUSSION OF EVIDENCE

The research of this thesis was, principally, undertaken of written evidence. State archives produced rare primary sources, and was supplemented by valuable secondary sources.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

The types of primary sources used included the diaries of travelling women such as Mary Ann Friend and Jane Roberts; of female colonists such as Anne Whatley and Frances Mitchell and even of such men as George Fletcher Moore, who commented extensively on all aspects of colonial society. Colonists' letters also proved helpful in describing everyday life and the foreign experiences of colonial life. These letters ranged from men and women of the gentry such as the Tanners, to free labourers and indentured servants such as William Dyer. As well as personal

records, State records such as the Colonial Secretary's Office correspondence and various court records were accessed to gain a more balanced view of items mentioned in personal recollections. So too were various colonial newspapers, in particular *The Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*. These provided information on major events in Fremantle and insights to everyday life such as food, market availability, building materials, labour and market prices.

The challenge with documentary analysis lies in the gaps which exist in archival and historical sources. While the Swan River Colony was founded as a free colony, and its citizens arguably more affluent than the convicts or soldiers of eastern Australia, it is likely there were illiterate people arriving, especially women. In studying the experiences of all variety of women in Fremantle during this period, it was a challenge to obtain an accurate picture of the colonists, especially the women who left no personal recollections.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources used for research of this thesis fell into two categories: first, general histories of Western Australia in its early colonial years and, secondly, women's histories such as Crawford and Gregory mentioned above. The first genre includes some histories told in what Simon Stevens calls the 'gentry tradition'. These, he argues, promote a top-down, male-dominated history, written by those who 'possessed the political and cultural hegemony of the landed elite'.<sup>13</sup> This version of Western Australian history has been the 'story of success and prosperity and movement towards enlightenment'.<sup>14</sup>

## TRADITION OF SCHOLARSHIP

Given the broad period of time during which Western Australia's traditional histories were written, a number of pivotal historians could be considered to have added to it: J.S. Battye (writing in early twentieth century); F.K. Crowley (principally active in the 1950s and 1960s); and

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<sup>13</sup> Stevens, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> C.T. Stannage, *Western Australia's Heritage; The Pioneer Myth*, University Extension – University of Western Australia, Monograph Series 1, 1985, p.3.

Geoffrey Bolton, arguably Western Australia's most prolific historian (publicly active since the 1950s). These historians have emphasised the economic and political achievements of the state, and as such remain intently masculinist interpretations of the past. Tom Stannage commenced a challenge to the 'gentry tradition' of Western Australian history from the 1960s and 1970s, and this thesis aligns with this 'new wave' of Western Australian historiography.

Battye's *Cyclopaedia of Western Australia* is the dominant history of the state's development and representative of early examples of Australian historiography.<sup>15</sup> The product of twenty years of research by Battye of primary sources in London's Public Record Office, the famous early history of Western Australia is a development-history of the state. His publication is now an invaluable resource due to its heavy reliance on primary documentation. However, it is a very masculine history and lacks direct references to female colonists. Battye's *Cyclopaedia* is the perfect example of the work my thesis will build upon; incorporating the personal stories and experiences of female colonists during the first two decades of the Swan River Colony in Fremantle into a strong, historically accurate base. Battye's other publications, such as *The History of the North West of Australia: Embracing Kimberley, Gascoyne and Murchison Districts* and 'Causes which led to the Colonisation of Western Australia', Extract from the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Western Australia*, vol. 5, also offer useful information for my study, though they largely exclude women's history.<sup>16</sup>

Following the tradition of Battye, F.K. Crowley's *Australia's Western Third* is a history of Western Australia's development; economic, political, but with little reference to social development.<sup>17</sup> As with Battye, Crowley's histories include very few references to women in the Swan River Colony. This may not be a conscious exclusion, rather that the focus of their study

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<sup>15</sup> J.S. Battye, *Western Australia: A History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*, Oxford University Press, London, 1924.

<sup>16</sup> J.S. Battye, *The History of the North West of Australia: Embracing Kimberley, Gascoyne and Murchison Districts*, V.K. Jones & Co., Perth, 1915; J.S. Battye, 'Causes which led to the Colonisation of Western Australia', Extract from the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Western Australia*, vol.5, 1918-1919.

<sup>17</sup> F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the first settlements to modern times*, Macmillan & Co Ltd (in association with the University of Western Australia Press), New York, 1960.

revolves around historically masculine spheres of public life and government. Crowley's immense body of work in Western Australia history, while largely unrelated to my selected time, adds to the strong base of Battye's own, and as such provides some base for my own research to build upon.

Geoffrey Bolton is a most prolific modern scholar in Australian history. Bolton's articles are relevant to aspects of my study as they offer a slightly different perspective to those of Battye and Crowley. Bolton's inclusion of the human element of the past into the traditional history of Western Australia provides a helpful example for my own writing. For example his study of prominent leaders such as Alexander Forrest and Edmund Barton are not only the traditional histories of progress, but also provide a more personal, human element to the research.<sup>18</sup> Again, like Battye and Crowley, the specifics of my research will aim to build upon Bolton's own work of history during the first two decades of the Swan River Colony, particularly his now aged article, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry'.<sup>19</sup>

Tom Stannage's *A New History of Western Australia*, though twenty years old, remains the principal work in the 'new wave' of Western Australian history to date and due to its eschewing of the 'gentry tradition' will be most relevant to my research. Stannage's history is a modern interpretation of Western Australian history, dividing the history of the state into themes covering all aspects of development. His focus on social history is most important to my thesis. Stannage's *New History* provides a good base on which to build my own thesis, all chapters are relevant to the different areas I will research and connect with female colonist's experiences between 1829 and 1839. A number of Stannage's other published works have proven invaluable for finding further resources, in particular; *The People of Perth; A Social History of Western Australia's Capital*

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<sup>18</sup> G.C. Bolton, *Alexander Forrest: His Life and Times*, Melbourne University Press (in association with the University of Western Australia Press), Carlton (Vic), 1958; Geoffrey Bolton, *Edmund Barton*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', in *Historical Studies*, vol.13, no.51, October 1968, pp.307-328.

*City and Western Australia's Heritage: The Pioneer Myth*.<sup>20</sup>

Since the 1980s, such Australian feminist scholars as Patricia Crawford, Jenny Gregory, Jan Gothard, Raelene Frances and Penelope Hetherington, have replenished the history of Western Australia by paying particular attention to gender experiences, community histories, Indigenous history and culture, and sustainability. Their work has been nurtured by the University of Western Australia's *Studies in Western Australian History*. There have been three *Studies* journals published regarding women's history, most recently being *Women in Western Australian History*, edited by Crawford, which covers areas of women's visibility and integration into Australian historiography.<sup>21</sup> *Women and Citizenship: Suffrage Centenary*, edited by Crawford and Skene, is not relevant to my studied period as it addresses the role of women in twentieth-century Australian society.<sup>22</sup> *Being Australian Women: Belonging, Citizenship and Identity*, edited by Lange, also addresses areas of Western Australian women's history outside my research era, but provides valuable scholarship on a multicultural perspective of women's participation in Western Australian society.<sup>23</sup>

Two women's histories in particular provided inspiration and guidance for the approach of this thesis. Penny Russel's *Savage or Civilised: A History of Manners in Colonial Australia* and Jan Gothard's *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia* provided an example for approaching my own interpretation of colonial Fremantle women's history. While focussed on the eastern states, Russel's book stood out from other Australian women's histories because her subject matter focussed on a subject not extensively covered by other records, something I hope my thesis will mirror in respect to women's history in Western Australia. Gothard's record of single female migration to Australia was closely tied to the themes covered in my research, and

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<sup>20</sup> C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City*, Perth City Council, Perth, 1979; C.T. Stannage, *Western Australia's Heritage: The Pioneer Myth*, University Extension – University of Western Australia, Monograph Series 1, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> *Women in Western Australian History*, *Studies in Western Australian History*, Patricia Crawford (ed.), vol.7, Department of History - University of Western Australia, December 1983.

<sup>22</sup> *Women and Citizenship: Suffrage Centenary*, *Studies in Western Australian History*, Patricia Crawford and Judy Skene (eds), vol. 19, Department of History – University of Western Australia, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> *Being Australian Women: Belonging, Citizenship and Identity*, Cheryl Lange (ed.), *Studies in Western Australian History*, no.21, Department of History – University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 2000.



provided a good framework for my own research to follow.

#### VALUE OF THIS THESIS TO HISTORIOGRAPHY

My research will contribute to the current scholarship by enhancing the understanding of British women's experiences of early colonial Fremantle and, by extension, of Western Australia. In order to weigh the challenges and benefits of life in early Fremantle, my thesis will explore the primary sources left by the women themselves, explaining in their own words the hardships and triumphs of colonial life. By illustrating both loss and triumph, my research will provide a more balanced view of women's lives in early colonial Fremantle.

# CHAPTER 1

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## THE JOURNEY, 1829-1830

For women emigrating to Fremantle, their first experience of colonial life was the voyage to the new settlement. The dangers associated with the journey were high. Illness was prevalent onboard, as was violence, and loss of life was a very real threat. The loss of husbands, employers or guardians would effectively end a woman's chances of settlement at Swan River and force their return home. As the primary care-giver for children, women were also faced with the numerous dangers to children onboard a ship, including infant mortality, accidents, illness and drowning. While they may have hoped for higher social interactions and the opportunity of social advancement, both were very limited, if not impossible given the stratified society endorsed aboard the ship.<sup>24</sup> Due to the harsh reality on board the many migrant ships bound for Fremantle between 1829 and 1830, Swan River Mania remained a distant hope.

Swan River Mania was another name for the 'get-rich-quick scheme' of Empire building in Western Australia in 1829;<sup>25</sup> offering an opportunity for a better life, with promises of healthy, fertile soil, pleasant climate and an abundance of easily cleared land and fresh water that was in stark contrast to the living conditions in post-war Britain.<sup>26</sup> The end of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe left a large number of soldiers unemployed in Britain.<sup>27</sup> These soldiers, along with many workers, labourers and their families, were attracted to the opportunities Swan River Mania presented.<sup>28</sup> Under the regulations for emigration to the Swan River settlement published by the Colonial Office, the colony promised an 'untainted social environment' to a genteel community,

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<sup>24</sup> Emma Curtin, 'Gentility Afloat: Gentlewomen's Diaries and the Voyage to Australia, 1830-80', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 105, Oct 1995, pp.638-639.

<sup>25</sup> Calder, pp.16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Shane Burke, 'Fences, Furrows, Ditches and Settlement Policy: Rapid Landscape Change in the Swan River Colony', in *History Australia*, vol.4, no.1, 2007, Monash University EPress, [Accessed from <http://journals.publishing.monash.edu/ojs/index.php/ha/article/view/342>, 20/4/2011], pp. 03.3-03.4.

<sup>28</sup> Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p.5.

free from convicts.<sup>29</sup> For merchants, investors and Britain's labouring poor, this dream of social acceptance was thought to be attainable at Swan River. The hopes of the people who emigrated to the new colony are illustrated in an extract of a poem by T. Campbell, Esq., published in *The Fremantle Observer, Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal* in May 1831. Campbell wrote of the pride of emigrants, their dreams to own their own property and livestock, to see beyond the dark days of England, and to the future of their children 'in youthful beauty wedded to the sun; to skirt our home with harvests widely sown, and call the blooming landscape all our own...'.<sup>30</sup> This expression of hope and new opportunity drove British emigrants to the colony at Swan River.

When women embarked upon the voyage from Britain to Fremantle, they must have experienced a myriad of emotions, surrounded by the chaotic conditions aboard the emigrant ships with fellow passengers 'taking leave of their friends, some crying, some laughing, others quarrelling, fighting swearing.'<sup>31</sup> Jane Roberts, writing her travel book on her journey around the world from 1829 to 1831, ominously noted that the emigrant's homeland rose behind them 'in meridian splendour, whilst the one to which they are going appears enveloped in gloom and uncertainty...'.<sup>32</sup> This is reflected in the painting 'The Last of England' by Ford Madox Brown, which depicts a couple leaving Britain in 1864-66.<sup>33</sup> Brown's haunting image of a couple leaving for Australia reflects the inner turmoil many colonists felt upon disembarking for Fremantle.

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<sup>29</sup> O'Brien and Statham-Drew, p.13.

<sup>30</sup> Campbell, 'On the Departure of Emigrants for Swan River'.

<sup>31</sup> Bayly, pp.107-109.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Roberts, *Two Years at Sea: Being The Narrative of a Voyage to the Swan River and Van Dieman's Land, During the Years 1829, 30, 31*, Richard Bentley, London, 1834, p.3.

<sup>33</sup> Ford Madox Brown, 'The Last of England', 1864-66, Tate Collection.

<sup>34</sup> 'Western Australian Shipping: Passenger Ships Arriving in Fremantle, Western Australia (1829-1889)', Perth Dead Persons Society, <http://members.iitnet.net.au/~perthdps/shipping/mig-wa.htm> [Accessed 13/10/2011]; See also: *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping, 1 July 1864 to 30 June 1865*, Cox and Wyman, London, 1864.



Ford Madox Brown, 'The Last of England', 1864-66. Although the painting was completed in 1866, outside the period considered by this thesis, migrant ships leaving Britain for Australia were of similar tonnage and passenger numbers in 1829 and 1830, and thus similar conditions were experienced by passengers in both periods.<sup>34</sup>

The voyage could take as long as five months,<sup>35</sup> during which time passengers lived in cramped quarters with few land excursions and little reprieve from the poor food, often in damp, dank conditions below deck that promoted illness. One of unaccustomed passengers' first experiences of the voyage was seasickness.<sup>36</sup> Passengers were advised by emigrant manuals that

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Nathaniel Ogle, *The Colony of Western Australia; A Manual for Emigrants 1839*, James Fraser, London, 1839, p.16.

illness would pass once stormy seas settled, and were assured that the voyage to Swan River was 'one of general tranquillity'.<sup>37</sup> This may not have comforted Second Officer George Bayly's passengers on the *Hooghly* two days out of port. He wrote of 'men, women and children lying about in all directions, crying and groaning and wishing they had never left their homes'.<sup>38</sup> Yet seasickness was among the least serious of illnesses onboard that had the capacity to take a devastating toll on women. Poor rations have since been blamed for the disturbed health of passengers, especially of those in steerage. In his study of eating and drinking in the early Swan River Colony, Bob Reece argues that the consumption of ship's biscuit, with its high salt content, and want of fresh fruit and vegetables caused ailments such as scurvy, dysentery, stomach and bowel upsets that continued long after the duration of the journey.<sup>39</sup> Illness affected everyone onboard, regardless of whether they suffered directly or cared for others in their party. Eliza Brown wrote to her father while on the journey to Swan River, confessing that the usefulness of her maids had been 'wholly impeded by the illness' befalling their entire party.<sup>40</sup>

Potential colonists were urged by emigrant manuals to ensure there was a reputable surgeon onboard their migrant vessel, someone who was used to the sea and most importantly had passed their college examination.<sup>41</sup> Surgeon Collie, a military doctor aboard the *Sulphur* to Swan River, complained to Captain Dance of the cramped conditions which caused the women under his care immense discomfort and ill health. He wrote the women were 'benumbed from wet and exposure, some affected with febrile symptoms with fainting and with hysterical paroxysms from being crammed up in their births [sic] and from want of ventilation'.<sup>42</sup> Many women on board these emigrant ships were mothers, some were pregnant on the journey. The ship's doctor would often be the only medically trained officer onboard the ship, and could be the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bayly, p.110.

<sup>39</sup> Bob Reece, 'Eating and Drinking at Early Swan River Colony', Paper presented at the Royal Western Australian Historical Society General Meeting, 19 May 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Eliza Brown, *A Faithful Picture: The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852*, Peter Cowan (ed.), Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, 1977, p.30.

<sup>41</sup> Ogle, p.12.

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted this was a military vessel, not a purpose built passenger ship. Collie to Dance, 16/1/1829, Swan River Papers 3, quoted in Appleyard and Manford, p.13.

deciding factor in preserving the life of mother and child.

The close quarters of the emigrant's ship not only bred disease, but feelings of discontent between passengers that occasionally spread to violence. Less than two months into the journey of the *Hooghly*, Bayly recorded a fight between two women which left one with two black eyes, while the other 'had a little claret extracted to say nothing of a pound or two of hair'.<sup>43</sup> Examples of domestic violence against women, were also recorded. On 9 January 1830, Bayly wrote that a wealthy female cabin passenger reported ill and had not appeared at mealtimes for almost a week. The woman who 'attended her as nurse said her husband had been thrashing her and given her a black eye'.<sup>44</sup> Bayly's journal suggests the violence was alcohol-fuelled and the woman was wholly undeserving of the treatment accorded by her husband.

The violence of the weather encountered by the vessels was also destructive, causing much damage to belongings and livestock essential to an emigrant's prosperity in the new colony. Jane Roberts wrote that people took all they possessed in the world with them to their new lives in the colony.<sup>45</sup> The occasional loss of these belongings in heavy seas on the voyage to Fremantle was a devastating event. William Dyer, an indentured servant, who was accompanied by his wife and children to Swan River, described the 'long and perilous' five-month voyage in which all his master's cart horses were lost, had two cows washed overboard and more killed below decks from the tossing of the ship.<sup>46</sup> Such losses were not only a financial blow, but severely hindered colonist's ability to clear land and travel, or to provide food and breeding stock for cattle in the fresh settlement. Women bemoaned the damage done to household goods, including crockery, saucepans, tea-kettles and cooking goods, described by some as flying about below decks in violent weather.<sup>47</sup> The losses of kitchen equipment affected their capacity to prepare meals after arrival, and were not easily replaced in the new settlement.

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<sup>43</sup> Bayly, p.115.

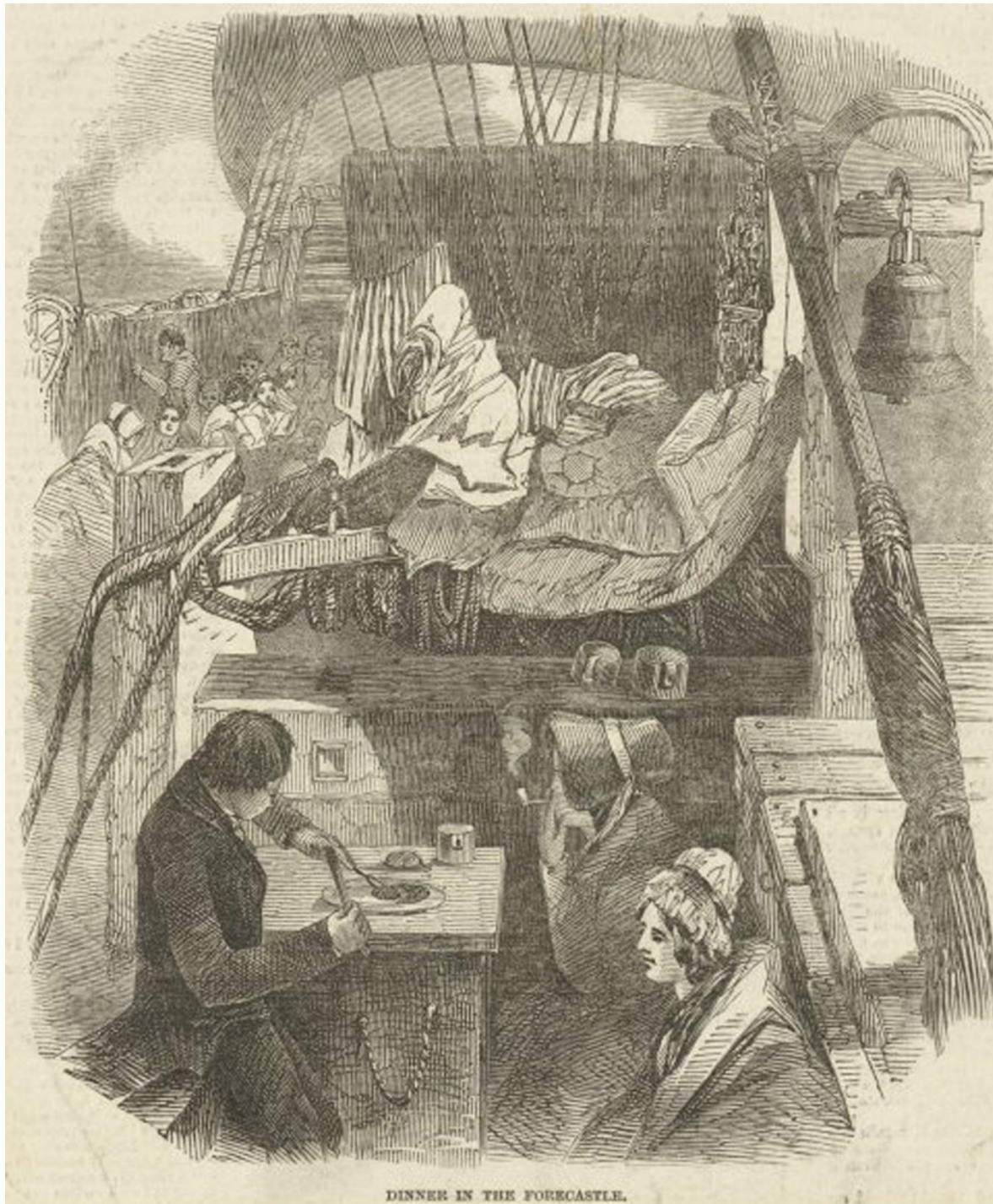
<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, p.2.

<sup>46</sup> William Dyer to George Dyer, 4/2/1830, Dyer Letters, Acc 1598A, J.S. Battye Library of Western Australian History.

<sup>47</sup> Bayly, p.123.





Walter G. Mason, 'Scenes on board an Australian emigrant ship', depicts the close, cramped quarters of life aboard migrant ships to Australia in 1849. The emigrant ships of this period were of similar tonnage and passenger numbers to the emigrant ships bound for Swan River in 1829 and 1830. Thus, the conditions depicted in Mason's work, would have been very similar to those experienced by women on the voyage to Fremantle.<sup>48</sup>

As parents or guardians of small children, women on board felt great anxiety over their charges occasionally falling foul to accidents aboard the migrant ships. George Fletcher Moore

<sup>48</sup> Lloyd's Registry of Shipping, *The Register of Shipping for the Year 1829*, Society for the Registry for Shipping, London, 1829; Lloyd's Registry of Shipping, *The Register of Shipping for the Year 1839*, Society for the Registry for Shipping, London, 1830.

recorded an incident in 1830 of a young boy being dragged overboard by tangled ropes while fishing.<sup>49</sup> A sailor instantly jumped overboard to assist the child until a lifeboat was lowered, the greatest fear on board not being his drowning, but that the sharks they had just witnessed moments before would attack them both; Moore notes 'it was a scene of intense and awful anxiety'.<sup>50</sup> Bayly records a similar incident on 28 January 1830, when the son of a steerage passenger lost his balance and fell overboard while hanging clothes on the rigging.<sup>51</sup> His mother became hysterical, going into 'fits and did not recover from the effect of the fright for several days'.<sup>52</sup>

The greatest challenge some women experienced during the voyage to Swan River was the loss of their husband or male guardian. Strict social conventions meant it was impossible for a woman to undertake such a voyage unaccompanied,<sup>53</sup> and as such, the loss of a husband or male guardian often ended a family's settlement at Swan River. As the captain's wife, Mary Ann Friend held the highest status of any lady aboard the *Wanstead*, a position that placed Jane Roberts under her guardianship when Robert's brother relapsed with 'brain fever' and was left at the Cape 'under strong delusion'.<sup>54</sup> Jane Daly was travelling with her young family onboard the earliest ships to Swan River in 1829 when her husband and daughter were drowned in a boating accident at Cape Town, forcing the end of her colonial experiment.<sup>55</sup> It was reported that the boat was swamped by heavy seas<sup>56</sup>, leaving Jane Daly with her remaining children 'doubly bereaved' and 'half-way across the world from home'.<sup>57</sup> Jane Roberts recorded that Mrs Daly continued her voyage to Swan River 'in a state bordering on distraction', having all her worldly possessions

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<sup>49</sup> George Fletcher Moore, *Diary of Ten Years of an Early Settler in Western Australia*, Facsimile Edition, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978, p.5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Bayly, p.122.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Curtin, p.636.

<sup>54</sup> Friend, p.12.

<sup>55</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.82.

<sup>56</sup> John K. Ewers, *The Western Gateway; A History of Fremantle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1971, p.3.

<sup>57</sup> Calder, pp.21-22.



aboard the ship, yet now intending to return home to Britain at the first available opportunity.<sup>58</sup>

The loss of her husband was the ultimate personal sacrifice in her emigration to the Swan River Colony.

The voyage reinforced the stratified society of Britain; there was little social equality between the passengers with accommodation on board being an immediate block to hopes of social advancement.<sup>59</sup> There was a distinct class division between the most affluent Cabin-passengers, intermediate Cabin-passengers for Navy officers and the Steerage cordoned off for passengers such as indentured servants and assisted passage emigrants<sup>60</sup>. For a price, a higher berth could be purchased.<sup>61</sup> If this opportunity was presented, the social climbers would have to abide by the strict, highly regulated and refined behaviour of 'civilised' society<sup>62</sup>. If they observed the proper form and good manners they had a chance to enter the upper levels of society on board and in the new settlement.<sup>63</sup>

The voyage to Fremantle was the female migrant's first experience of colonial life. Swan River Mania presented them with promises and opportunities their lives in Britain could not. The challenges they faced in coming to Swan River were many and varied. Women often felt isolated and wary of the colonial unknown. This included the spectre of illness that affected all onboard, which took an enormous toll on female passengers. The close quarters onboard the ship not only bred disease, but stoked fiery tempers that led to outbursts of violence and recorded domestic abuse. One of the most debilitating costs of life onboard emigrant ships was the loss of belongings, especially livestock, which would severely impede the colonist's ability to prosper in Fremantle. The most destroying aspect of the voyage was the loss of children, husbands, protectors and/or male guardians, which as social convention dictated would end a woman's colonial experiment, often before it had begun.

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<sup>58</sup> Roberts, p.37.

<sup>59</sup> Curtin, pp.638-639.

<sup>60</sup> Ogle, pp.13-15.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>62</sup> Russell, p.6.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.8.

# CHAPTER TWO

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## ARRIVAL, 1829-1832

The early arrival period at Fremantle, from 1829 to 1832, was harsh, unforgiving and a challenge of the endurance and perseverance of colonists. For the women of colonial Fremantle, these early years represented huge risk; they faced inadequate housing, the trials of a strange environment and fear of native attack. In such an environment, their children were in constant danger of accidents and their men faced equally dangerous challenges of establishing a livelihood for their families. There were very few benefits for them in such a society. Social advancement was possible for a few and domestic servants gained from the increased freedom their scarcity in the new colony provided. Overwhelmingly, the costs of this early settlement period far outweighed the benefits gained by women in the colony.

The reality of life in the new colony was far from ideal. Manning Clark described the early arrivals to Swan River: 'after the landing... husbands and wives huddled together on the beach among the pianos, chairs, beds and stores wondering where Stirling's promised Garden of Eden could be'.<sup>64</sup> Women were met with a depressing landscape: it was barren, wild and unforgiving. Mary Ann Friend describes the feeling upon arrival, that 'melancholy appears to pervade all classes and great dread is felt'.<sup>65</sup> Fremantle was a haphazard settlement of scattered belongings spread over sand, sparse, barren and lowly wooded ground, far removed from the promises of 'Swan River Mania'. The captain of the brig *Dragon* described Fremantle as a 'perfect bed of sand',<sup>66</sup> which Roberts described as 'brilliant white... which the children called snow, and wondered why the trees were green!'.<sup>67</sup> Mary Ann Friend described the landscape of Fremantle, as 'low and sandy', the 'trees were quite bleached and leaning in one direction, giving evident

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<sup>64</sup> Manning Clark, *A History of Australia: Vol. III, The Beginning of an Australian Civilization 1824-1851*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1973, p.22.

<sup>65</sup> 'The Diary of Mary Ann Friend', *Early Days: Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol.1, no.10, 1931, p.3.

<sup>66</sup> Appleyard, and Manford, p.149.

<sup>67</sup> Roberts, p.43.

proof of constant heavy winds from one quarter'.<sup>68</sup> Between September 1829 and April 1830, thirty-six emigrant ships arrived, bringing the population of Fremantle to approximately 1500 colonists.<sup>69</sup> 'In the inevitable disorder which accompanied the attempt to colonise in a hurry',<sup>70</sup> passenger's belongings were offloaded directly onto the beaches, struggling colonists carried their possessions a quarter mile uphill to the main township, toiling 'ankle deep through fine sand' carrying 'furniture, ploughs and even pianos'.<sup>71</sup> This pandemonium gave Fremantle a dismal, uneasy atmosphere that was difficult to settle in.

The first significant challenge for women in early colonial Fremantle was housing. Despite the population growth, the town developed very slowly and there were few permanent dwellings for colonists.<sup>72</sup> A number of families lived in tents until land grants became available, even up to three years after the first arrivals.<sup>73</sup> In mid-February 1830, Bayly described the Fremantle township as 'merely a few tents and marquees, with here and there a wooden house, but these are far and few between'.<sup>74</sup> Eliza Shaw wrote to an English newspaper in September 1830 describing her family's tents as 'higgledy-piggledy, up to our ankles in sand. Our cart serves four of us for a bedstead; the boys and men lie on beds on the ground, and more complete wretchedness you never beheld'.<sup>75</sup> From the *Wanstead*, Mary Ann Friend was more complimentary, writing that Fremantle 'strongly resembles a Country Fair and has a pretty appearance, the pretty white tents looking much like booths'.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps Friend was more complimentary towards Fremantle's tents because, as one of the highest ranking women in the new colony, she was afforded sturdier accommodation. Friend lived in a sturdy timber crate dwelling, previously used as a horse house on the journey from Britain, a comfortable home that Friend would 'make a tolerable

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<sup>68</sup> Friend, pp.13-15.

<sup>69</sup> Appleyard and Manford, p.150.

<sup>70</sup> Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p.7.

<sup>71</sup> Globe, letter from Swan River, 27/1/1830, quoted in Appleyard and Manford, p.154.

<sup>72</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.113.

<sup>73</sup> Moore, p.150.

<sup>74</sup> Bayly, p.126.

<sup>75</sup> Eliza Shaw, letter to the *Leicester Journal*, published 24/9/1830, in Appleyard and Manford, p.150.

<sup>76</sup> Friend, p.14.



Mary Ann Friend, 'View at Swan-River. Sketch of the Encampment of Matthew Curling Friend, Esqr. R.N., March 1830', 1830.

residence'.<sup>77</sup> The camp's layout was detailed in Friend's watercolour of Swan River in 1830.<sup>78</sup> Her servants lived in tents pitched either side of the horse house, they cooked 'under a neighbouring tree', with a meeting area in front of the house, flanked by tree trunks for sitting around the fire in the evenings.<sup>79</sup>

Such accommodation at Fremantle encouraged swarms of pests; flies, mosquitoes and fleas, often mistaken for local pepper ticks that inhabit the Swan Coastal Plain, plagued colonial life in Fremantle. Friend wrote of being 'teased to death by the flies',<sup>80</sup> while in Bayswater Mrs Anne Whatley wrote in April 1830 that the only way to rid their home of mosquitoes was 'to fill the place with strong smoke', regularly at sunset.<sup>81</sup> A common pest complaint was fleas. These

<sup>77</sup> Roberts, p.49; Friend, p.19.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Ann Friend, 'View at Swan-River. Sketch of the Encampment of Matthew Curling Friend, Esqr. R.N., March 1830', State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Friend, p.19.

<sup>81</sup> Anne Whatley, *Diary of Mrs John Whatley, neé Anne Rutt, Daughter of John Towill Rutt, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1830*, J.S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, B/WHA, p.9.

sand fleas<sup>82</sup> lived in clothing, on animals, and were through the colonist's belongings. *The Western Australian Gazette* published a poignantly comic poem on June 13, 1830, titled 'An Ode of the Fleas of Fremantle', voicing one man's such frustration, and giving voice to the afflicted colonists at Swan River.

Australian disturbers of my sleep,  
No more my weary body bite  
Be gone you rogues your distance keep  
Let me snore away the night

Will you suck the crimson flood  
You hopping jumping ugly \_\_\_\_  
Will nothing please you but my blood  
And let that flow with torment

Then sake your fill you thirsty elves  
'Tis with my life tho' to my sorrow  
Drink scoundrels drink and burst yourself  
That I may have some sleep tomorrow.<sup>83</sup>

These pests did not plague the colonists in isolated cases; they were often afflicted by more than one kind at a time. Friend details a particularly traumatic night, when

'scarcely was the candle out when out rushed Rats. Two trotted over my head, a third, more bold, came over my face, which so frightened me I was obliged to awake Mr. and Mrs. Wells. A candle was procured but alas there was no chance of sleep for the place was full of the largest fleas I ever saw'.<sup>84</sup>

Following the first few years, letters containing complaints of fleas no longer appear in the records, colonists either rid themselves of the pests, or simply became used to the problem. The constant plague of pests was coupled with difficulties for British emigrants to acclimatise to Fremantle's weather. The colonist's tents were hastily erected, without any consideration for airflow, leaving them unusable during the day when they became 'about the temperature of an oven after an extinguished fire'.<sup>85</sup> This was not such an exaggeration; Jane Currie recorded the

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<sup>82</sup> Statham, 'Swan River Colony 1829-1850', p.185.

<sup>83</sup> 'An Ode of the Fleas of Fremantle', *The Western Australia Gazette*, 13/6/1830.

<sup>84</sup> Friend, p.17.

<sup>85</sup> Roberts, p.51.

temperature inside her tent to be 114 and 106°F on February 8, 1830.<sup>86</sup> The summer heat seems to have been largely unexpected<sup>87</sup>. Friend complained at the beginning of February 1830, that ‘we are always thirsty – always drinking and never satisfied.’<sup>88</sup> The heat became just another challenge for the colonists, and their effectiveness to succeed in the harshness of early Fremantle. These were relatively trivial complaints compared with the reality of food scarcity and the impending famine facing women in early colonial Fremantle. In these early years, colonists were largely dependent on the supplies they brought with them, or which could be bought from arriving ships, making a staple diet of weevil-ridden flour and salted meat such as pork and beef.<sup>89</sup> As early as April 1830 a local newspaper noted ‘nearly 2000 open mouths, have been daily expecting supplies of provisions, more particularly Flour, and have witnessed with great anxiety a “Sail” of an arriving cargo ship.’<sup>90</sup> Shipping was unreliable, but necessary as no arrangements had been made prior to colonist’s crops becoming fruitful, leaving quite a number of families living on ship’s provisions while they waited for land allotments to begin the slow process of harvesting crops in an unfamiliar climate.<sup>91</sup> The treacherous coast of Western Australia also claimed several cargo ships, causing a severe shortage of even basic ship’s provisions, especially in the earliest years of settlement.<sup>92</sup> Food scarcity did not improve in later years, as a decline in shipping after the initial rush of settlement left the town, once again, struggling with starvation.<sup>93</sup> While colonists did bring livestock with them, a number were lost during the voyage and became such precious possessions upon arrival in the colony that they were kept for breeding stock and not used for

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<sup>86</sup> Currie, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> Markey, p.90.

<sup>88</sup> Friend, p.20.

<sup>89</sup> Bob Reece, ‘Eating and Drinking at Early Swan River Colony’.

<sup>90</sup> *The Western Australia Gazette and General Advertiser*, 4/4/1830.

<sup>91</sup> Calder, p.35.

<sup>92</sup> Friend, p.26.

<sup>93</sup> Pamela Statham-Drew, *James Stirling; Admiral and Founding Governor of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2003, p.200-201.





Jane Currie, 'Panorama of the Swan River Settlement', 1830-32 (details above and right)

food.<sup>94</sup> Mary Ann Friend wrote of the common sight of a 'fine cow lying dead on the beach'.<sup>95</sup>

These losses meant that even fresh milk could not be found in Fremantle.<sup>96</sup> Local produce was no more reliable, Friend noted in February all gardens she had seen in Fremantle had failed, save for one small potato patch.<sup>97</sup> The lack of local produce was due to the colonist's inexperience in the Australian climate and with Fremantle's unpredictable soil meant they often killed the plants before they could mature.<sup>98</sup> They found the landscape difficult to read; good land was patchy among the generally sandy limestone of the coastal strip.<sup>99</sup> The small amount of good soil that was available in the colony was slow to develop.<sup>100</sup> Despite some reports which recorded an abundance of locally grown vegetables, 'grown to the greatest perfection'<sup>101</sup> and Fremantle's ability to support itself from its own gardens<sup>102</sup>. The town came close to famine in 1832 with supplies of wheat reaching such critically low levels that a Government schooner was sent on an

<sup>94</sup> Roberts, p.60; see also, Reece, 'Eating and Drinking at Early Swan River Colony'.

<sup>95</sup> Friend, p.24.

<sup>96</sup> Roberts, p.48.

<sup>97</sup> Friend, p.15.

<sup>98</sup> Roberts, pp.60-61.

<sup>99</sup> Calder, pp.31-32.

<sup>100</sup> Burke, p.03.8.

<sup>101</sup> William Thos Stocker, extract from Hobart Town, 30/8/1832, in *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 12/1/1833.

<sup>102</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 9/2/1833.



emergency supply mission to Mauritius.<sup>103</sup>

Faced with famine, women devised new ways of feeding their families. Kangaroo became a fast favourite for colonial families as it had little fat, was common, and made an 'excellent substitute for fresh beef' in traditional English dishes, with the tail in particular making for delicious soup.<sup>104</sup> Black cockatoo, wild duck, swans, quails and a variety of pigeons were early fresh meat alternatives.<sup>105</sup> Mrs Hester Tanner recorded her recipes and household hints for colonial women in 1831, including her fool-proof recipe for colonial curry, she wrote that 'you can curry anything'.<sup>106</sup> Despite this adaptability, stocks ran low. Women were faced with the constraints of colonial food supplies and poor farming that caused them to live under famine conditions during the early years of settlement.

These famine conditions exacerbated colonial health problems, particularly skin ailments, water-borne diseases and eye complaints. The lack of fresh vegetables and frequent high consumption of salted provisions, resulted in sores, much like boils, all over the colonist's bodies, which doctors first attributed to the climate, but the heat was found to simply exacerbate the skin

<sup>103</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.131.

<sup>104</sup> Whatley, p.10.

<sup>105</sup> Currie, pp.2-3; Reece, 'Eating and Drinking at Early Swan River Colony'.

<sup>106</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, p.224.



ailments.<sup>107</sup> Lack of fresh food and clean drinking water caused an outbreak of diseases such as scurvy and dysentery across Fremantle.<sup>108</sup> In a letter to the Colonial Secretary in March 1830, colonist James Birkett explained his family's condition at Fremantle, his son 'so weakened by Dysentery at this moment as to render his services no longer available to us, and his mother is well-nigh exhausted by excessive anxiety' over her son's condition.<sup>109</sup>

Ophthalmia was a common health affliction to Fremantle's colonists, and was mentioned in surviving letters and diaries. Anne Whatley described ophthalmia as 'agony beyond anything; a sensation of scalding water poured on the eyeballs', the only relief found by using 'blue glasses'.<sup>110</sup> It was an affliction unique to the southern colonies, thought to be a consequence of the sudden transition and exposure to all types of weather, and related to cleanliness.<sup>111</sup> Jane Currie recorded a case of ophthalmia in her little baby during April 1831<sup>112</sup>, once the height of summer had passed and Fremantle's climate should have been far more moderate and comfortable to not produce such eye complaints. It is now known to occur from a deficiency of Vitamin A.<sup>113</sup> Even after leaving the colony, women often attributed their eye complaints to their time at Swan River. Friend recorded her eyes suffering from the same condition, even after leaving Swan River for the far milder climate at Hobart, Tasmania.<sup>114</sup> The health complaints of Fremantle often had lengthy consequences, and while they were not always debilitating, served as yet another challenge to women's resolve to persevere with settlement.

One of the greatest uncertainties of life in colonial Fremantle was the shadowy presence of the local Aboriginal people. Early illustrations, such as Jane Currie's watercolour panorama of Fremantle painted between 1830 and 1832, include groups of 'natives' gathered at the foot of the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.5 (11/4/1831); p.12 (10/10/1831).

<sup>108</sup> Statham, 'Swan River Colony 1829-1850', p.186.

<sup>109</sup> James Birkett to Peter Brown Esq., letter, SRO – CSO, Acc. 36, vol.5, p.135.

<sup>110</sup> Whatley, p.13.

<sup>111</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, p.12 (10/10/1831); *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 9/2/1833

<sup>112</sup> Currie, p.14.

<sup>113</sup> Deborah Tout-Smith (et.al.), *The Foundations of Fremantle: Exploring the Early History of Western Australia's Port city*, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1998, p.21.

<sup>114</sup> Friend, p.32.

hills, east of Fremantle, their presence symbolic of their significant impact to colonial life.<sup>115</sup> They were often recorded as a menace, other early caricatures of Swan River Society depicting them as vaudevillian thieves.<sup>116</sup> Eliza Shaw was adamant that 'it is not safe for a white woman to be seen by them, as they are perfectly savage, and would take [women] off by force if they could lay their hands on them; even female children are unsafe to be alone'.<sup>117</sup> There were accounts of Aboriginal groups attempting to kidnap women from the outskirts of the settlement. Friend recorded one such event of a gentleman coming down the river from Fremantle when he came across 'Natives endeavouring to carry off a female servant. He fired and they fled'.<sup>118</sup> This does not survive in newspaper archives, however it did fuel the folklore of fear surrounding Aboriginal groups in the area. The shadowy nature of the natives in colonial folklore produced a sense of fear amongst women in the colony, especially as they came into contact with them less frequently than their menfolk whose occupations took them into a wider sphere of the settlement. There are very few records of the first encounters between colonists and Aboriginal people<sup>119</sup>, but the anxiety of the early colony still pervades the literature, as it did the psyche of the earliest female colonists. This fear proved to be another challenge for women to overcome during the early years of Fremantle's settlement.

The women's fear would have been more warranted towards their fellow colonists as cases of domestic violence against women were prevalent.<sup>120</sup> One such case involved Thomas Dent of Fremantle, who was brought before the Court of Quarter Sessions at Fremantle, charged with assault and battery of his wife in December 1832.<sup>121</sup> Dent claimed his wife has given him just reason for his actions through her lack of 'any endearing epithets, which might be expected, from an affectionate wife, addressing a beloved husband' in the letters she wrote him during his time

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<sup>115</sup> Jane Currie, 'Panorama of the Swan River Settlement', 1830-32, National Library of Australia

<sup>116</sup> 'Specimen of the Society At The Swan River c. 1830', National Library of Australia.

<sup>117</sup> Eliza Shaw, letter published in the *Leicester Journal*, 24/9/1830, in Appleyard and Manford, p.183.

<sup>118</sup> Friend, p.29.

<sup>119</sup> Neville Green, 'Aborigines and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century', in C.T. Stannage, *A New History of Western Australia*, p.79.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Court of Quarter Sessions Records, 1832-39, SRO, CONS 3422/1.

in gaol for previous attacks upon her.<sup>122</sup> Dent's actions were not isolated incidences, neighbours testified to witnessing regular, daily succession of assaults upon Mrs Dent, never with any provocation on her behalf.<sup>123</sup> Upon her insistence, Mrs Dent had a neighbour take away her child for fear of its safety, it was noted its mother bore 'marks of violence on her throat'.<sup>124</sup> Despite the obvious danger of Dent to the community, especially to his wife and family, he was only given a 3 month sentence in Fremantle gaol<sup>125</sup>, after which time he was 'to find security for his good behaviour'.<sup>126</sup> The Chairman noted that although this was an aggravated case, 'similar assaults have been very prevalent to the colony'.<sup>127</sup>

Alcoholism aggravated violence amongst some colonists. Alcohol was prevalent and relatively inexpensive, especially with the publication of domestic brewing recipes in local newspapers that made beer a cheap alternative to the brackish water of the colony.<sup>128</sup> Drunkenness was common, especially among the unemployed such as soldiers and indentured servants waiting for land allotments and work to begin.<sup>129</sup> William Heath published a none-too-complimentary caricature of Swan River in 1830, depicting it as a decrepit swill-pit of drunkenness, the only flourishing aspect of the settlement being 'The Swan Tavern', surrounded by run-down colonists, wretched children and weeping women.<sup>130</sup> Authorities attempted to suppress alcoholism, at least in the public eye, but it remained a dangerous problem, even among women.<sup>131</sup>

Children were not exempt from violence in Fremantle. A number of men were brought before the courts for committing assaults on children. For example, in April 1833 John Pare (living under the alias John Courie) a Portuguese man, was brought before the Court of Petty Sessions, charged with assault, with the intent to commit rape, of 7 year old Mary Ann Withnell at

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<sup>122</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 5/1/1833.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Court of Quarter Sessions Records, 1832-39, SRO, CONS 3422/1.

<sup>126</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 5/1/1833.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 11/1/1834.

<sup>129</sup> Appleyard and Manford, p.175.

<sup>130</sup> William Heath, 'Flourishing State of the Swan River Thing', 1830, National Library of Australia.

<sup>131</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 6/4/1833.

Fremantle in February.<sup>132</sup> He was found not guilty and discharged after being held for almost two months.<sup>133</sup> While the authorities did what they could to keep the streets of Fremantle safe from danger, it must be assumed that not all were accounted for and prosecuted.

Single women were brought to Swan River at very young ages as the exclusive maidservant of a family. Colonists wanted domestic servants who were young enough to remain single<sup>134</sup>, because if they were of marriageable age, single male colonists would 'jump at them'.<sup>135</sup> William Tanner of Upper Swan advised any lady leaving England to bring one or two girls aged between nine and thirteen, so 'they will be able to do something by the time they arrive', otherwise 'they will soon be married which will annul their engagement with you'.<sup>136</sup> Young female domestic servants often fell prey to the unsavoury aspects of Fremantle's society. Elizabeth Gamble was one such young woman. She fell pregnant to a visiting sailor in 1829 while working as the maidservant to Mrs Drummond at Fremantle. It was recorded that Gamble cared little for her child, and was quoted as saying to Mrs Drummond, that if she had a pair of shoes or slippers, she 'would no longer be bothered with the child, but would take it down to Fremantle, throw it on the deck of the ship to the father of it'.<sup>137</sup>

It was this attitude that brought Gamble under suspicion of a house fire in mid-February 1830 that burnt her quarters to the ground, killing her young child in the blaze.<sup>138</sup> Gamble denied responsibility. Her clothes were also destroyed in the fire, this evidence used to prove that if she had been responsible, she would have surely removed these, her most precious items, first.<sup>139</sup> Fremantle Magistrate, William Mackie concluded the child's death an accident, and he was 'of the opinion that the neglect shown by the suspected party towards the child arose more from a blindness of parental feeling too common among persons of her class, than from evil

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<sup>132</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 16/2/1833; See also 6/3/1833; Court of Quarter Sessions Records, 1832-39, SRO, CONS 3422/1.

<sup>133</sup> Court of Quarter Sessions Records, 1832-39, SRO, CONS 3422/1.

<sup>134</sup> Gothard, *Blue China*, p.ix.

<sup>135</sup> Brown, p.22.

<sup>136</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, p.32.

<sup>137</sup> W.M. Mackie to Peter Broun, Esq., letter, Re: Elizabeth Gamble, Perth, 20 February 1830, SRO, CSO, Acc. 36, vol. 5, p.65.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



'Specimen of the Society At The Swan River', ca. 1830, depicts Aboriginal people and thieving pick-pockets and wild savages.



William Heath, 'Flourishing State of the Swan River Thing', May 1830.



design'.<sup>140</sup> The detriment to Gamble was great, her reputation was ruined, severely diminishing her opportunity for further work in the colony, she suffered the loss of her child in horrific circumstances, being acquitted of the charge of infanticide on the basis of social discrimination due to her position as a single female servant.

The death of a child was a regular event. Accidents were common: children were burned in house fires, fell down wells, drowned and illness was rife.<sup>141</sup> While a number of these events were common in Britain, they were exacerbated by the isolation and already difficult conditions of the colonial experience. An example of one such loss was the disappearance of little Bonny Dutton. The Duttons were residents in the outskirts of Fremantle<sup>142</sup>, whose eldest child John Dutton (affectionately referred to as Bonny Dutton), aged 4, went missing in March 1830.<sup>143</sup> Rumours abounded as to his disappearance. Jane Roberts wrote that the three Dutton children were playing around the family's tent and for a time their mother did not perceive her eldest was missing.<sup>144</sup> Roberts speculates 'whether he had strayed away and lost himself in the wood, or had fallen into the river', as there was no trace of him.<sup>145</sup> Mary Ann Friend supposed it was natives who had carried him off, as a local Aboriginal group had been seen near the Dutton's lot before the disappearance.<sup>146</sup> Anne Whatley's account agrees, having commented it 'seems certain' the Natives were the blame for his vanishing from the campsite.<sup>147</sup>

Despite the search, it appears Bonny Dutton was never found. Friend does not remark on his return and Whatley ends her account of his disappearance in late April, with the sad news that he had not been recovered.<sup>148</sup> There is some discrepancy in that report as Roberts, writing whilst

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> *The West Australia Gazette*, 1/6/1830; 'Augusta in 1833: Reflections (January to December, 1833) from the Diary of Nancy (Ann Elizabeth Turner) widow of Captain James McDermott and daughter of James Woodward Turner', *Early Days: Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 1, part 4, 1929, p.21; Brown, p.75; Currie, p.2.

<sup>142</sup> Ewers, pp. 7 and 207.

<sup>143</sup> Ian Berryman, *A Colony Detailed: The First Census of Western Australia, 1832*, Creative Research Perth, 1979, p.176.

<sup>144</sup> Roberts, p.70.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Friend, p.25.

<sup>147</sup> Whatley, p.6.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. p.12.

in Van Dieman's Land, claimed Dutton had been found, the natives had only taken him as a 'matter of curiosity' to show their women, they had been kind to him, and 'restored him to his parents well.'<sup>149</sup> The July 1832 Swan River Colony census recorded the Duttons as having two children, however when they left for Sydney in January 1833, they are recorded as having three children, with no record of a new child being born or baptised in the colony's parish register.<sup>150</sup> This could be a record-keeping error, an incorrect translation of the original documents by previous historians. It is more likely Bonny Dutton was not returned, but the circumstances of his disappearance are vague; while it is more likely he fell victim to an environmental accident, we do not know enough from the early Aboriginal people of the area to rule out kidnapping on their behalf. Either way, the loss of a young child, particularly to the unknown, would be a devastating for any mother, and a great sacrifice for settlement at Fremantle.

As in the voyage to Swan River, the death of a husband or male guardian was an all too great loss for women to bear; it often ended their settlement and signalled their return to Britain. Due to their work in the home, some women did not have a source of income independent of their husband's; assets were often tied up in land grants that were untitled due to government regulations, leaving them stranded with no means to remove themselves from the situation.<sup>151</sup> Women could try and locate work outside the home, but the care of children often made this impossible. The alternative was to remarry or leave the colony to live with extended family, often back in Britain. Anne Whatley became a widow in September 1830, after the loss of her husband to drowning, and was forced to leave Swan River.<sup>152</sup> She kept a diary of her journey home to Britain, but included few details of her husband's death, simply noting that she and her two children journeyed downriver to Fremantle, boarded the ship *Katherine* bound for Hobart.<sup>153</sup> Whatley's was a common story, with women abandoning the settlement in great distress: the cost of losing a husband or male guardian too great to continue with colonial life.

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<sup>149</sup> Roberts, p.71.

<sup>150</sup> Berryman, p.176.

<sup>151</sup> Statham, *James Stirling*, p.181.

<sup>152</sup> Whatley, p.20.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.21-23.

Despite the hardship, and the number of families it drove from the colony, there were some women who benefited from early colonial life in Fremantle. The gentry found themselves elevated in this small society, and reaped the social benefits. Jane Currie was one such lady, who would not be described as aristocratic in Britain, but regularly dined with the Governor and his wife at Swan River.<sup>154</sup> Mary Ann Friend is another lady who achieved social advancement from her emigration to Fremantle. As the Captain's wife, she was not only an important woman on board the *Wanstead*, but also one of the most respectable ladies in the new colony. Upon arrival, Friend became a member of a prestigious ladies literary society, third only to the Governor and Surveyor-General's wives.<sup>155</sup>

These gentlewomen defined themselves by fashion and social conventions. They wore the widest skirts and highly decorative bonnets, despite the inconvenience of Western Australia's climate.<sup>156</sup> The new gentry were eager to promote themselves through particular ways of living and behaving.<sup>157</sup> Socialising was inexplicably linked with such class consciousness; the gentry held dinner parties, dances and took tea together.<sup>158</sup> In September 1831, the first Government Ball was held at Perth.<sup>159</sup> George Fletcher Moore wrote that 'all the world here is going to the ball', those in attendance were considered to move 'in the first circle of society and home'.<sup>160</sup> Between 120 and 180 people attended, men and women danced until 6am, filling four rooms and an arcade of Government House.<sup>161</sup> Despite the food shortages, guests dined on an abundance of fresh food, truly illustrating their wealth and status in this small colony.<sup>162</sup>

Domestic servants gained a great deal from their emigration to the smaller society at Fremantle. Female servants were in short supply, making their skills valuable and competitive,

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<sup>154</sup> Currie, p.3.

<sup>155</sup> Friend, p.29.

<sup>156</sup> Cowan, 'Early Social Life and Fashions', p.10.

<sup>157</sup> Bolton, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', p.307.

<sup>158</sup> Calder, p.37.

<sup>159</sup> George Fletcher Moore, quoted in *ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*; Stannage, *The People of Perth*, p.28.

<sup>161</sup> Currie, p.17; Cowan, 'Early Social Life and Fashions', p.2.

<sup>162</sup> Currie, p.17



and thus, their pay increased dramatically.<sup>163</sup> Their scarcity afforded them freedom; women were offered work outside the domestic sphere, earning positions in public houses and businesses, widening their skills area, and thus their employability.<sup>164</sup> By November 1831, potential employers were advertising attractive working conditions with 'liberal wages' to lure female servants.<sup>165</sup> George Fletcher Moore remarked in August 1831 that 'masters here are only so in name; they are the slaves of their indentured servants' due to their scarcity and importance to the colony.<sup>166</sup> In October 1831, William Tanner complained of 'their consequent badness, for they know their importance and assume accordingly'.<sup>167</sup> Their disgruntled employers remained at the mercy of their domestic servants; it was no sooner they rid themselves of their insolent servants than their ex-employees would gain more work with newcomers, often for higher wages.<sup>168</sup> This new-found freedom was certainly a benefit for female servants in settling at Swan River.

Compared with the costs women bore in the early years of Fremantle, these benefits were few and far between. While the potential for social advancement and greater freedom were attainable in the early colonial period, the costs of this life were harsh. For those women who left the colony during the period to 1832, the catalyst often came in the form of personal disaster and loss. While female colonists could endure the heat, the fleas, the sand and tents, living in constant fear of native attack, illness, famine and crime, the loss of loved ones became too great for them to continue life in Fremantle. No amount of social status or freedom could overcome a lack of income: it ended their experiment in the colony and was a key reason for women to leave Fremantle during the period of first arrival to 1832.

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<sup>163</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, p.30.

<sup>164</sup> *Fremantle Journal and General Advertiser*, 27/2/1830.

<sup>165</sup> *The Western Australian*, 12/11/1831.

<sup>166</sup> Moore, p.60.

<sup>167</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, p.23.

<sup>168</sup> Roberts, p.104.

# CHAPTER THREE

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## PROMISE OF PROSPERITY, 1833-1839

From 1833, conditions in Fremantle began to improve at an unforeseen rate, famine subsided and the town itself held realistic potential for the first time since Stirling's initial exploration. Adaption to colonial conditions resulted in an increase in production, staving off impending famine and allowed women business and land ownership opportunities, a degree of social freedom and sense of community in this changing colonial environment. Although this later period was marked with increased frontier clashes between colonists and Aboriginal resistance, the frontier itself began to shift further afield, following new pastoral leases on the outskirts of the colony, leaving Fremantle relatively free of the worst conflict. Conditions in 1833 marked a turning point for Fremantle: for the first time in its short history, the benefits of emigration were attainable and the colonist's hopes for life at Swan River were being realised.

Circumstances in 1832 had left the colony in a state of famine. Crops had failed, colonists had not yet adapted to the environment and decreased emigration meant fewer ships and provisions to port, depleting existing food stores at Fremantle. This shortage resulted in prices of existing supplies to rise to inflated levels, often beyond the means of colonists. High prices continued until the end of 1833, when there was a perceptible shift in colonial production with the colony's first plentiful harvest of locally grown produce.<sup>169</sup> This harvest ushered in a period of economic consolidation for the colony; over-production saw a decrease in local prices, a relief from famine conditions and even a profitable export industry in basic food-stuffs and pastoralism.<sup>170</sup> By February 1834, the famine was truly broken, local newspapers recorded markets as 'tolerably well supplied', in comparison with earlier years.<sup>171</sup> This trend continued for the remainder of the decade, with limited periods of economic struggle. By 1837 the colony was

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<sup>169</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.131.

<sup>170</sup> Statham, 'Swan River Colony 1829-1850', p.189.

<sup>171</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 1/2/1834.

entirely self-supporting, only requiring imports of clothing and luxuries, the prices of these were offset by exports of wool and produce.<sup>172</sup>

This economic improvement provided business opportunities for women in Fremantle. Women worked primarily in the hospitality industry. This work involved the preparation of food, management of inns and hostels and service in public houses and hotels throughout the Swan River Colony. William and Ann Keats applied for a liquor licence for their 'House', the King's Arms in Henry Street, Fremantle, in May 1833.<sup>173</sup> Their business offered meals and accommodation in the west end of Fremantle. The inclusion of both names is interesting given the nature of people frequenting the Arthur's Head area. It was known to be dangerous, filled with visiting sailors and their unsavoury pastimes,<sup>174</sup> hinting at a need for increased security of such premises and thus the inclusion of William Keats' name in advertisements. According to liquor license records, it was not unusual for women to be the sole proprietors of hotels and public houses.<sup>175</sup> These women came from notable families and thus had their family's name and wealth to support the business venture. Mary Ann Bateman, a member of the prosperous merchant family in Fremantle, applied for a Publican's Licence at Fremantle in March 1834, having already obtained an allotment of land in the town.<sup>176</sup> Mary Ann Bateman's application and land ownership illustrate the increased amount of freedom for women during this period of Fremantle's settlement.

Female landholders were increasingly common in Fremantle from 1833 onwards. While there are scattered records of their allotments in the earlier years of settlement, in 1833 there was a sharp increase in female names assigned to allotments at Fremantle.<sup>177</sup> The names often occur in family groups, alongside other men and women with the same surname.<sup>178</sup> The first woman mentioned in the *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal* as being granted a land

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<sup>172</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.143.

<sup>173</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 25/5/1833.

<sup>174</sup> A.H. Stone, letter to the *Brighton Gazette*, 20/5/1830, in Appleyard and Manford, p.175.

<sup>175</sup> See *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 5/6/1833; 25/5/1833; 8/3/1834.

<sup>176</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 8/3/1834; Ogle, p.xxxv.

<sup>177</sup> Ogle, pp.xxxv – xxxvi.

<sup>178</sup> See Ogle, 'Land Allotments: Fremantle', pp.xxxii – xxxvii.

allotment at Fremantle is Lydia C. Duffield, Lot 401, in January, 1833.<sup>179</sup> Her family is recorded as having numerous land grants in Fremantle before this period, mostly under the name John Duffield. He was granted four allotments before other Duffields appear in the record, notably Charlotte and Lydia C. Duffield.<sup>180</sup> It could be that John Duffield was building his family business across a number of lots around Fremantle, using his family's names to secure more than his fair share. It is unlikely Duffield would use these lots for personal use as he was granted a separate suburban lot, probably on the outskirts of Fremantle, along with other notable names as Solomon, Samson, McDermott and Dodd, who used their allotments to build large family homes.<sup>181</sup> The appearance of Lydia and Charlotte's names, especially across the 1833-35 period is interesting as it coincides with so many other women's names appearing in the land allotment records. It is possible these women's menfolk used their names to secure more land. On the other hand, it could represent a shift in the freedom of women in Fremantle, as they were now able to individually apply for land grants for their families and businesses. Applications for liquor licenses by Mary Ann Bateman<sup>182</sup> and Ann Keats<sup>183</sup> coincide with land grants for Mary Ann Bateman of Lot 418 and Ann Keats of Lot 429, both in Fremantle, and both within the 1834 timeframe.<sup>184</sup> The coincidences suggest these women were granted land together with business licenses, indicating a sudden surge in women's freedom outside the domestic sphere.

Women's increased freedom was most evident in the lives of domestic servants in Fremantle. The hardship of early settlement caused some employers to free their indentured servants<sup>185</sup>, but with the sudden economic potential of 1833, female workers found themselves such a necessity that they could demand certain freedoms not previously afforded to them. These freedoms mirrored those afforded to domestic servants in the early years of settlement, but now as free workers they could demand wages and conditions not available in that tough economic

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<sup>179</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 19/1/1833.

<sup>180</sup> Ogle, pp.xxxii-xxxv.

<sup>181</sup> See Ogle, 'Land Allotments: Fremantle', pp.xxxii – xxxvii.

<sup>182</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 8/3/1834.

<sup>183</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 25/5/1833.

<sup>184</sup> Ogle, p.xxxv.

<sup>185</sup> Appleyard and Manford, p.183.

climate. This was true of indentured domestic servant Anne Tew, who gained her freedom during the harsh economic reality of early settlement, and reaped the benefits of migration during 1833 as better economic conditions vastly improved her income. Tew was brought to Fremantle with her mistress under a verbal indentured agreement. The agreement was put in writing by her mistress upon arrival at Fremantle.<sup>186</sup> Tew was unsure of the validity of this document.<sup>187</sup> She sought new employment, and is reported to have broken into her former mistresses dwelling, stolen the indenture document and burnt the evidence, under the urging of her current employer.<sup>188</sup> Tew's two employers took the case to the Civil Court, where it was agreed Tew would pay her passage money to her initial mistress, and remain under the employ of her new master as a free labourer.<sup>189</sup> After her period of indenture, it appears Tew was never out of work. Both a Mr Wright and a Mr J. Morgan testified to hiring Tew, it seems she earned enough money from this employment to repay her initial employer the £45 passage money to Fremantle.<sup>190</sup>

During this period of economic consolidation, female domestic servants were hired for specific duties. Where once there may have only been money to employ one servant per household, domestic labourers were now being sought for specific tasks. An advertisement in March 1834 called for a 'respectable female servant who understands the care of children, and can wash well'<sup>191</sup>. A significant number of colonists in the early years of settlement could afford neither the time, nor money for the luxury of clean clothes.<sup>192</sup> Hiring a domestic servant for the sole purpose of such a chore was a sign of improved economic conditions, and for the domestic servants themselves who were handsomely paid for this specialist work.<sup>193</sup> While not actively engaging in the economics of the colony, working women certainly benefited from the improved conditions with freedom of employment and higher wages.

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<sup>186</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 19/1/1833.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Cause List, Civil Court Records [Fremantle], 8 January 1833, SRO, CONS 3547/1.

<sup>190</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 19/1/1833.

<sup>191</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 29/3/1834.

<sup>192</sup> Roberts, p.64.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

Merchant class families were in a far better position during the 1833 period than the earlier years of settlement. While some left the colony prior to 1832, those who persevered with settlement at Fremantle were rewarded with better social status and opportunities for their children to advance through colonial society by improved education. The colonial gentry used their education to distinguish themselves<sup>194</sup>, something the colonial merchants believed key to entry into higher society. One of the early shortcomings of colonial life was the absence of institutions, more specifically Fremantle's lack of educational facilities.<sup>195</sup> Women played a significant role in the education of Fremantle's children. Mary Ann Bateman became schoolmistress at Fremantle in 1836.<sup>196</sup> In 1846, the Sisters of Mercy arrived in Fremantle to establish Catholic schools throughout the Swan River Colony.<sup>197</sup> Their Fremantle school began in 1847, with the purchase of Lot 66 in Henry Street by Bishop Brady, who employed local woman Louisa Cresswell as the schoolteacher for an annual wage of £40, until Sisters could be spared to establish a full-scale convent at the site.<sup>198</sup> The Sisters developed a good reputation for their method of schooling in the colony<sup>199</sup>, and together with other women had a significant influence on the schooling of Fremantle's youth.

Increased work opportunities for women, as well as improved education of their children in colonial institutions, developed a sense of identity to the colonial community of Fremantle from 1833 onwards. Culturally, there was a significant identity shift within settlers, from being British visitors to a sense of belonging to the Swan River Colony. Emigration did not transfer every aspect of British culture or gentility, the effect of colonial development forced a 'reworking of gentility into a culture that was appropriate to colonial conditions' and colonist's 'own circumstances and

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<sup>194</sup> Bolton, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', p.325.

<sup>195</sup> Laader Fletcher, 'Education of the People', in C.T. Stannage (ed), *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1981, pp. 551-552.

<sup>196</sup> Tout-Smith (et.al.), p.17.

<sup>197</sup> Geraldine Byrne, *A Basilica in the Making: The Centenary of St. Patrick's Fremantle*, Mazenod Press, Fremantle, 2000, pp.4-5.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>199</sup> Brown, pp.91-92.

needs'.<sup>200</sup> Part of this reworking of culture was the changing relationships between classes.

Colonial conditions had changed the role and position of servants, rendering their skills far more valuable than previously, effectively transforming the established social structure and relationships of British life.<sup>201</sup>

This changing sense of community was especially noticed by colonial women. When Eliza Brown's young son drowned in the river near her York property in January 1845, she wrote to her father of the 'human comfort we have been offered from all the neighbourhood and distant parts of the Colony, even strangers interesting themselves in our trial for the loss of a beloved child...'.<sup>202</sup> Women's shared experience of hardship under colonial conditions and the changing social structure of British life within colonial society, brought them together and developed a sense of belonging to a Swan River community, especially noticeable after 1833.

In Fremantle, this sense of belonging was enhanced by the rapid transformation of the town's development during the latter years of the decade. Fremantle's landscape changed little from 1830 to 1832, there were a few permanent structures, but many colonists lived in tents or lean-to shacks.<sup>203</sup> The first public building in Fremantle, the gaol, was completed in 1832, high on Arthur's Head on the western side of the town.<sup>204</sup> With increased wealth injected into Fremantle after 1833, the town expanded; buildings became more permanent, and more houses appeared where tents were once homes. Colonel Hanson, Quarter Master of the British colony in Madras, visited Fremantle during 1833 and wrote, 'several good stone and brick houses were in progress, the property of respectable Colonists, and indeed all classes seemed to be governed by the same praise-worthy spirit of industry and good feelings towards each other'.<sup>205</sup> We gain some idea of Fremantle's development from idealistic paintings by colonists in 1832, such as J. Cross's

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<sup>200</sup> Curtin, p.652.

<sup>201</sup> Appleyard and Manford, p.183.

<sup>202</sup> Brown, p.75.

<sup>203</sup> Currie, 'Panorama of the Swan River Settlement', 1830-32.

<sup>204</sup> Richard Morrell, 'View of Freemantle [i.e. Fremantle], Western Australia from Church Hill E. of the town 1832', National Library of Australia.

<sup>205</sup> Extract from printed pamphlet by Colonel Hanson, *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 12/1/1833.



Charles Wittenoom, 'Sketch of the town of Fremantle from the Court House – Arthur's Head, Western Australia', 1839.

illustration of the town from Canning Road, high on the eastern hills of the settlement. Cross seems to have excluded all tents and lean-to structures from his work, leaving only sturdy looking buildings, laid out across a neat axis using the gaol the hills as the main points.<sup>206</sup>

By 1839, the town reflected a sturdy establishment with well-tended permanent housing and neat gardens. This was best portrayed in a portrait of the town by Charles Wittenoom.<sup>207</sup> By this time Fremantle had its own postal department, an important step in the identity of the town making it seem more permanent and less isolated than the earlier years of settlement.<sup>208</sup> The development of the colonial township removed many of the woes of Fremantle's women. Those who had experienced the early years of settlement suffered greatly from the conditions of tent life, the sand, the pests, the constant threat of native attack they felt they were more vulnerable to living in such isolated conditions. These were mostly expunged by the construction of permanent

<sup>206</sup> J. Cross, 'View of Fremantle, Western Australia, from the Canning Road', 20 September 1832, National Library of Australia.

<sup>207</sup> Charles Dirk Wittenoom, 'Sketch of the town of Fremantle from the Court House – Arthur's Head, Western Australia', 1839, National Library of Australia.

<sup>208</sup> J.K. Hitchcock, *The History of Fremantle: The Front Gate of Australia 1829-1929*, The S.H. Lamb Printing House, Fremantle, 1929, p.2.



dwelling, the development of town infrastructure such as the gaol in 1832, and the establishment of a postal office would have done wonders to relieve feelings of isolation.

Despite feeling safe in more permanent dwellings, the years from 1833 were marked by a significant increase in frontier conflict between colonists and local Aboriginal tribes. The origins of this increased violence are unclear. Some accounts justify the increase in colonist retaliation for the spearing of a soldier's wife in 1833.<sup>209</sup> However, this may have been Aboriginal retaliation for what was seen, even by colonists, as the 'wanton murder of an unoffending native' by the Tasmanian servant of Major Nairn, who wanted to 'show how the aborigines were dealt with in Tasmania'.<sup>210</sup> The sudden increase in frontier warfare may be due to the development of colonies further afield than previous economic and social conditions allowed. It has been argued that perhaps the colonists were too busy with survival than to be concerned with the Aborigines, which supports the lack of evidence of first encounters with local tribes.<sup>211</sup> Curious tribesmen visiting the various settlements around Fremantle were now reported as behaving insolently, and newspapers frequently printed news of skirmishes without confirmation.<sup>212</sup> In fact, colonial newspapers seemed to fuel the fire of 'native confrontation' providing constant narration of the conflict, emphasising the fault of local Aboriginal groups at every opportunity. As the decade progressed, and frontier conflict grew more intense, it was still relatively safe at Fremantle because the warfare became less focussed on the township and moved with the shifting frontier to the outskirts of the colony. There were very few major clashes or threats at Fremantle, fear was spread by news reports rather than firsthand accounts of warfare.

Although frontier conflict was not prevalent in the town of Fremantle itself, the colonists did not remain unaffected by the conflict in the colony. The increased warfare and retaliatory violence of the outer settlements characterised this later period of settlement at Swan River. The first execution at Fremantle gaol took place as retribution, or justice as it was seen by the

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<sup>209</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.120.

<sup>210</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 4/5/1833.

<sup>211</sup> Green, p.79.

<sup>212</sup> *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 23/3/1833.

colonists, for the murder of Sarah Cook and her baby daughter at their York property by two Aboriginal men, Doodjep and Bunaboy.<sup>213</sup> Cook was speared to death in May 1839 while her husband was away from the property, the house was then set alight with Cook and her daughter inside.<sup>214</sup> The trial revealed that Doodjep and Bunaboy committed the murder as a retribution killing<sup>215</sup>; revenge for the imprisonment of their kin for stealing sheep.<sup>216</sup> George Fletcher Moore prosecuted the case, and he spoke of the murder as

the most wanton and savage [murder] which has been committed since the establishment of the Colony; wanton because it was committed without the slightest provocation on the part of the unfortunate victim... and savage because it was committed upon a lonely and defenceless woman and her helpless infant under circumstances of the basest treachery and the blackest ingratitude.<sup>217</sup>

The hanging of Doodjep and Bunaboy was a show trial for the heightened frontier conflict of the time. It illustrated the dangers posed to colonists, especially the vulnerability of women, on the frontier. Although the conflict did not take place in the town of Fremantle, the effect of frontier violence, namely the first execution in the colony, had a significant impact on the town and was a blight on the developments of the colonial community.

As the colony's economy consolidated, Fremantle's women gained more freedom outside the domestic sphere. In particular, taking on businesses and land grants. Just as in the early years of settlement, domestic servants found their scarcity made them valuable and afforded them greater freedom and higher wages. Merchants and urban white-collar workers benefited from the increase in colonial institutions such as education facilities for the social advancement of their family. An increase in colonial institutions was reflective of town developments at Fremantle; newer, sturdier buildings flourished across Fremantle. The more permanent dwellings not only transformed the landscape of the town, but also its inhabitant's sense of belonging. There was a

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<sup>213</sup> Brian Purdue, *Legal Executions in Western Australian*, Foundation Press, Victoria Park, 1993, p.1.

<sup>214</sup> Simon Adams, *The Unforgiving Rope: Murder and Hanging on Australia's Western Frontier*, University of Western Australia Publishing, Crawley, 2009, p.11.

<sup>215</sup> Purdue, p.1.

<sup>216</sup> Adams, p.11.

<sup>217</sup> *The Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 4/7/1840.

significant cultural shift to a mindset of colonial community and identity, marking Fremantle as an established town. Although this period was tainted by increased frontier warfare between colonists and Aboriginal tribes, Fremantle remained relatively unscathed by direct conflict. The clashes seemed to follow the moving frontier on the outskirts of the colony. Overall, in the period from 1833 onwards, the long-term benefits of settlement seemed to far outweigh the costs incurred in the earlier part of the decade. The opportunities hoped for in the early years of settlement had potential in this improved economic climate, women achieved more freedom, their families were more secure in both wealth and education, and life in Fremantle pointed to a brighter future than had seemed achievable in the early colony.

# CONCLUSION

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## RISE OR RUIN?

British women who migrated to Fremantle from 1829 aspired to join a new and gentrified society. They hoped for better living conditions, greater opportunities and social and economic stability. Colonisation was not without adversity. Female colonists faced disease, famine, poor land, violence, poor economic markets, isolation and financial peril.<sup>218</sup> It took time for conditions in Fremantle to improve. By 1839 it could be argued that life in Fremantle met the expectations and aspirations of its earliest female migrants.

Admittedly, women experienced a number of challenges along the way. The long voyage to Swan River was their first introduction to the hardships of colonial life. Conditions on board were not ideal: close quarters bred disease and feelings of discontent between passengers.<sup>219</sup> Some women became victims of violence. Loss was a definitive part of the journey for a number of female passengers. Some were relatively lucky to lose only personal possessions that would hinder their economic prosperity in the fresh settlement. Others were faced with the deaths of family or themselves. Mary Ann Bateman was one of a number of women to lose an infant at sea; Mrs Daly lost the life of her daughter and husband.<sup>220</sup> Due to social convention, women who lost their husbands or male guardians could not continue the journey alone,<sup>221</sup> often signalling the end of their colonial experiment before even reaching Swan River. Jane Roberts was one such woman. At the loss of her brother she was forced to remain on the *Wanstead* until it returned to London, nearly two years after she had left.<sup>222</sup>

The earliest years after arrival were particularly harsh for British women. Their first significant challenge was housing in the new colony: a majority of colonists lived in tents, plagued

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<sup>218</sup> Gare, 'The Female Frontier'.

<sup>219</sup> Collie to Dance, 16/1/1829, Swan River Papers 3, quoted in Appleyard and Manford, p.13; Bayly, pp.113-115.

<sup>220</sup> Tout-Smith, p.17; Roberts, pp.37-38.

<sup>221</sup> Curtin, p.636.

<sup>222</sup> Friend, p.12.

by sand, pests, heat and constant fear of the 'natives'.<sup>223</sup> Limited adaptability to local land conditions in the early years of the settlement caused crop failures, livestock loss and famine conditions at Fremantle.<sup>224</sup> These famine conditions exacerbated health problems, and a lack of fresh water caused a surge in water-borne diseases throughout the colony.<sup>225</sup> Colonists turned to alcoholism during the tough early years of settlement, commonly fuelling local crime and domestic violence against women.<sup>226</sup> Single female domestic servants were especially vulnerable in this climate: brought out at young ages, some fell prey to the unsavoury elements of Fremantle's society. Fremantle's inhospitable landscape caused many accidents: children went missing, husbands drowned and women were left without the means to continue settlement.<sup>227</sup> There were few advantages in these early years of the colony. There were opportunities of social advancement for respectable women in this smaller society.<sup>228</sup> The limited population also proved valuable to female domestic servants, whose small number afforded them a degree of employment and economic security that was rare in Britain.<sup>229</sup>

It must be concluded that many of the goals set for emigration in 1829 had been achieved by colonists in Fremantle by 1839. Or, at least, Fremantle offered the potential for the achievement of these goals. The colonists' adaption to Fremantle's land and climate by 1833 saw a perceptible shift in the economy, as agricultural production increased, ushering in a period of economic consolidation. This improvement provided greater economic and social freedoms for Fremantle's female colonists. Business opportunities, coupled with land ownership, made some women almost completely self-sufficient.<sup>230</sup> This was also reflected in the lives of domestic

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<sup>223</sup> Moore, p.150; Appleyard and Manford, p.150; Friend, p.17; Markey, p.90; Jane Currie, 'Panorama of the Swan River Settlement', 1830-32.

<sup>224</sup> Calder, p.35; Roberts, p.60; See also Reece, 'Eating and Drinking at Early Swan River Colony'.

<sup>225</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, pp.5 (11/4/1831) and 12 (10/10/1831); Statham, 'Swan River Colony 1829 – 1850', p.186.

<sup>226</sup> William Heath, 'Flourishing State of the Swan River Thing'; *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 5/1/1833.

<sup>227</sup> *The West Australia Gazette*, 1/6/1830; 'Augusta in 1833', p.21; Brown, p.75; Currie, p.2; Statham, *James Stirling*, p.181.

<sup>228</sup> Calder, p.37.

<sup>229</sup> Statham, *The Tanner Letters*, p.30.

<sup>230</sup> See Ogle, 'Land Allotments: Fremantle', pp.xxxii-xxxvii; *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 25/5/1833; *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 8/3/1834, et.al.

servants who demanded better wages and working conditions. An increase in colonial institutions, particularly schools, presented opportunities of social advancement for the merchant class families, and forged a sense of community at Swan River.<sup>231</sup> Despite this improvement, frontier violence with the local Aboriginal people increased during this latter part of the decade, although most of the major conflict took place outside of Fremantle.

The achievements of female colonists by the end of the first decade of settlement at Fremantle, mirrored their initial aspirations of emigration. The poem, 'On the Departure of Emigrants for Swan River', earlier discussed, illustrates the longing of British men and women who sought a better life for their families upon emigration. The following lines add to our understanding of what Fremantle's women may have hoped for, particularly in relation to economic security:

The deep-down wise, when children crown our hearth,  
To hear the cherub-chorus of their mirth,  
Undamp'd by dread that want may e're un-house.  
Or servile misery knit those Smiling brows.  
The pride to rear an independent shed,  
And give the lips we love unborrow'd bread...  
To Skirt our home with harvests widely sown,  
And call the blooming landscape all our own,  
Our children's heritage in prospect long.<sup>232</sup>

Women hoped for the social advancement of themselves and their family in the new colony.

Women played the role of 'transferring gentility' to the colonies through culture and defined social boundaries such as manners and poise.<sup>233</sup> Manners were both an excuse for exclusion from elite social positions and an opportunity to reach the upper echelons of society, especially in a colonial environment.<sup>234</sup> For their family's prosperity women looked towards the promises of fertile soil for farming, a pleasant climate for good health, an 'untainted social environment' and social acceptance that was in stark contrast to conditions in post-war Britain.<sup>235</sup>

In Fremantle by 1839, many of these goals had been realised. Land had been granted to

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<sup>231</sup> Bolton, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', p.325; Curtin, p.652; Appleyard and Manford, p.183.

<sup>232</sup> Campbell, 'On the Departure of Emigrants for Swan River'.

<sup>233</sup> Curtin, p.634.

<sup>234</sup> Russel, p.3.

<sup>235</sup> O'Brien and Statham-Drew, p.13.

many colonists,<sup>236</sup> and their adaption to Fremantle's climate meant that by 1837, the colony's agricultural production and food supply was entirely self-sufficient.<sup>237</sup> Women were actively involved in the economy as both business owners and land holders.<sup>238</sup> Female domestic servants could demand wages and working conditions not available in the tough economic climate of post-war Britain and the earlier years of settlement.<sup>239</sup> Fremantle developed as a significant port town, encouraging a sense of community through educational institutions and a changing, but shared, identity to the colonial town. Conditions at Fremantle had changed the role and position of the labouring and merchant classes, effectively transforming the established social structure of British life.<sup>240</sup> Class consciousness still existed, but a higher social status and social acceptance was more achievable in Fremantle in 1839. Charles Wittenoom's sketch of Fremantle in 1839 illustrates a thriving colonial township, with sturdy accommodation, blooming gardens and healthy colonists.<sup>241</sup> This was the life emigrants hoped for when embarking for Swan River, and it was the life attainable to them by the end the first decade of settlement in 1839.

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<sup>236</sup> See Ogle, 'Land Allotments: Fremantle', pp.xxxii-xxxvii.

<sup>237</sup> Battye, *Western Australia: A History*, p.143.

<sup>238</sup> See Ogle, 'Land Allotments: Fremantle', pp.xxxii-xxxvii; *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 25/5/1833; *Perth Gazette and Western Australia Journal*, 8/3/1834, et.al.

<sup>239</sup> Roberts, p.64.

<sup>240</sup> Appleyard and Manford, p.183.

<sup>241</sup> Wittenoom, 'Sketch of the town of Fremantle', 1839.

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